

Chapter 4: Eve of Destruction

Complete victory for their platform and candidates on November 8, 1898 was the goal for Democrats. Their strategy included the use of intimidation and scare tactics to keep black Republicans away from the polls and white Fusionists at bay. Towards the end of the campaign, leading Republicans saw clearly that the game was lost and that they should seek to prevent outright bloodshed in the name of politics. The final days of the campaign were hectic with politicians making last minute deals and the press relishing in the fracas as the daily papers contributed as much to the frenzy as did fiery speechmakers like Alfred Moore Waddell.

A Unifying Issue

Discussion of the 1898 white supremacy campaign cannot be complete without analyzing the contributions of Alexander Manly to the political circus. Manly's newspaper article challenging accepted beliefs regarding interracial relationships provided another weapon in the Democrat's white supremacy arsenal. Born in 1866, a descendant of Governor Charles Manly, and a native of Wake County, Alex Manly relocated to Wilmington after receiving an education at Hampton Institute. He was soon joined in business by several of his brothers who assisted him in opening the city's leading black newspaper, the *Daily Record*. Manly acquired a used printing press from Thomas Clawson, editor of the *Wilmington Messenger*, and successfully operated the paper for a number of years prior to the 1898 white supremacy campaign.¹ In

addition to his printing operations, Manly became involved in city politics and social life, teaching Sunday school at the Chestnut Street Presbyterian Church and serving as deputy register of deeds. Manly's paper was considered "a very creditable colored paper" and received white support through subscriptions and advertising. Because of its wide readership throughout the state, the paper expanded its publication from a weekly to a daily in 1897. Although the paper was supported by the white community through advertising, Manly used the paper as a voice for the city's progressive African American community as he sought universal improvement of blacks throughout the city. The paper advocated internal improvements, and its editorials managed to raise the ire of some whites.²

The editorial that proved to be the doom of the *Record* was printed in August 1898 as a response to a speech of Rebecca L. Felton of Georgia.³ Felton had developed

enough to switch to daily publication from weekly. Andrea M. Kirshenbaum, "Race, Gender and Riot," 38; Clawson, "Recollections and Memories."

² Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 68-70; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 585-6; Kirshenbaum, "Race Gender and Riot," 37-38; Clawson, "Recollections and Memories."

³ Some contemporary debate arose among Republicans and Populists as to whether Manly wrote the article and whether he was paid by Democrats to print it. It was speculated that Manly had spoken out against such claims and defended his paper as he claimed responsibility for the work. Chief of Police Melton felt Manly was prompted to print the article by Democrats as he testified that he thought "if Manly did not get a good round price for that editorial he ought to be put in the asylum for crazy." Melton also observed that if Democrats did not support Manly in some way they would not have allowed him to continue in publication until the election. He also explained that he was told that the paper was not suppressed because it was a good campaign tool for the Democrats. Melton claimed to have heard numbers of people state that they thought Manly was paid for the article and that Wake County

¹ It is unclear when Manly began publication of the *Record*, but the earliest extant copy dates to 1895. The *Record's* archives were apparently destroyed during the riot. By 1897, the paper was successful